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AMERICAN AND HUNGARIAN PERCEPTIONS OF CONVERSATIONAL STYLE AND THE ROLE OF THE LISTENER IN ENGLISH CONVERSATION

Amy SOTO
Eötvös Loránd University
amy.nicole.soto@btk.elte.hu

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate how native speakers of American English and Hungarian non-native speakers of English living in Budapest perceive conversational style and the role of the listener in English conversations. Studies have shown that backchanneling behavior differs by culture and language which may have an influence on L2 acquisition and intercultural communication (Maynard, 1986; White, 1989; Stubbe, 1998; Gumperz, 1982, 1992, 1996). This paper reports on the findings of semi-structured interviews conducted with three Hungarian women and three American women, ranging in age from 24-35. Interviews were conducted individually after participation in one of three conversation dyads: 1) American English native speakers 2) Hungarian native speakers 3) mixed. Findings show that participants share similar perceptions of conversational style and the role of the listener. Data suggest, however, that there may be differences in the perception of interruptions and "active listening" between Hungarians and Americans. Furthermore, cultural differences and linguistic proficiency may lead L2 speakers to avoid intercultural communication in the L2 with native speakers.

1 Introduction

This paper discusses samples of cross cultural and intercultural communication in Budapest, Hungary. Budapest is a major European city which attracts both tourists and expatriates who seek to enjoy its cultural heritage, low living costs, and business opportunities. While the local language is Hungarian, English often serves as the lingua franca among tourists, expatriates, and locals. Few visitors or long term expatriates dare to learn Hungarian. Generally, English, for its facility, is turned to as the lingua franca in service encounters, business settings, education, etc. My personal experience, as an expatriate living in Hungary and learning Hungarian, indicates that few Hungarians living in Budapest expect non-locals to learn or speak the language. My experience moving to Hungary, living in the culture, and trying to learn the language echoes that of another expatriate Marion Merrick who moved from England to Budapest in 1982 and wrote an autobiographical account entitled *Now You See it, Now You Don't*. During her first days in Budapest, Merrick (2009) reflects on her first encounters with Hungarian:

> I [...] idly turned the pages of the Hungarian newspaper lying beside me. I wondered if I would ever learn this language. At a party in England a year before

> we had met a Hungarian émigré who told us with some pride that it was a language impossible for a foreigner to learn. (p.11)

The pride is not only in the difficulty, but also in the regional uniqueness and complex beauty of the language. The acknowledgement of these factors and its difficulty for foreigners to learn may explain some of the acceptance of English as a lingua franca (ELF). Despite the fact that ELF facilitates intercultural communication by providing a common mode of communication, it may also hinder intercultural communication and relations. In Budapest, it may appear as if English were everywhere and as if everyone spoke English. ELF, however, is no one's native language. It is difficult to draw the line between where English as a lingua franca ends and English which is influenced by the culture and pragmatics of the native speaker populations begins. When speakers use ELF in intercultural communication in Budapest, where English is not the local language, which set of pragmatic rules and cultural notions do they rely on during conversation? How do non-native speakers and native speakers perceive the dynamics of conversation which influence subtle judgments about speakers and listeners? This paper seeks to explore how native speakers of American English (NSs) and non-native speakers of English (NNSs) living in Budapest perceive conversational style and the role of the listener in English conversations.

While investigating this topic, it is difficult to draw the line between cross cultural and intercultural communication. Gudykunst (2003) defines cross cultural communication as "comparisons of communication across cultures" and intercultural communication as "communication between people from different cultures" (p.1). This paper deals with both. The comparison of native speakers of American English and native speakers of Hungarian is cross cultural. However, it hopes to shed light on factors which influence intercultural communication on a broader scale. Although the participants are Americans and Hungarians, it is impossible to guarantee the comparisons are solely between American and Hungarian culture. L2 speaker perceptions of conversational style and the role of the listener in English may be based on interactions with people from many different English speaking cultures.

2 Literature review

Gender studies, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics are just a few of the fields which have contributed to the interdisciplinary endeavor of understanding the dynamics of conversation. Yngve (1970) highlights that conversation has two channels: a main channel used as a speaker takes a turn and a secondary channel used by the listener to give feedback to the primary speaker without taking away the conversational turn. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1978) apply the system of turn-taking described in other socially organized activities to conversation. In doing so, the authors describe the dynamics of conversation including participant roles and the rules governing who speaks when. A 'turn' in a conversation indicates when someone speaks. Therefore, roles in conversation include 'speakers' and 'listeners'. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1978) set out a framework with a complex set of rules governing turn allocation, turn transition, and turn construction. In conversation not only do participants use various 'unit types' (segments of speech or other signals, such as body language) to allocate, transition, or construct turns, but also perceive such conversational moves and respond to them. Schegloff (1982) adds to the aforementioned turn-taking framework by distinguishing 'primary' and 'non-primary' turns, and suggesting that 'non-primary' turns do not form a single set because they serve different interactive functions.

Later studies attempt to bridge the structural and conceptual frameworks applied to conversation analysis. As Iwasaki (1997) claims, to provide deeper conversational analysis it is necessary to differentiate 'floor units', or simply 'the floor', from a 'turn-at-

talk'. A turn is a simplistic structural notion which denotes when a participant speaks, but is not sufficient to specify the role of the participant. Schegloff (1982) notes that it is possible that during non-primary turns the conversational roles do not change. Floor, therefore, is a unit larger than a turn because it specifies the roles of participants as speaker or listener. The floor is not only a structural, but also a conceptual notion. As defined by Hayashi (1996), the floor can also refer to "a dynamic cognitive entity that links the interactants together socially and psychologically" (p.32).

As the frameworks of conversation acknowledge turn taking rules, attention is also directed to participant roles. Even when participants do not 'hold the floor' in conversation, they play active roles as listeners and provide feedback to the primary speaker. The literature often refers to listener feedback as reactive tokens or backchannels. Iwasaki (1997) states:

> [b]ackchannels are formally classified into three types: 'non-lexical backchannels', 'phrasal backchannels', and 'substantive backchannels'. Non-lexical backchannels are vocalic sounds which have little or no referential meaning, and form a closed set. Phrasal backchannels are stereotypic expressions with more substantive meaning than non-lexical backchannels [...] Substantive backchannels, however, are not stereotypic expressions, and they are full of referential content. (p.666)

Non-lexical backchannels in English may include 'mhmm' or 'uh huh'. Phrasal backchannels could be units such as 'Really?', 'You're kidding' or 'Right?'. Substantive backchannels contain referential content related to previous discourse. Some scholars consider backchannels to be a subset of reactive tokens because reactive tokens serve not only as feedback, but also as turn transitions (Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki, & Tao, 1996). For example, Clancy et al. (1996) identify five types of reactive tokens: backchannels, reactive expressions, collaborative finishes, repetitions, resumptive openers. Several frameworks describe the language use of listeners and speakers; however, it is also necessary to consider the perception of language use and its interpretation.

Gumperz (1982, 1992, 1996) highlights the importance of perception in conversation by discussing contextualized cues which are defined as verbal and non-verbal signals participants send during conversation about identity and how they feel towards the other. According to Gumperz (1982), "[c]ontextualized cues trigger participants' background knowledge with regard to social contexts or interpersonal relationships, which then allows them to infer what is happening at the moment and what the speaker's communicative intent is" (p.1944). Contextualized cues are not only backchannels and reactive tokens, but also include other signals such as body language, eye contact, etc. (Maynard, 1993). As Ishida (2006) argues, many studies focus on production of backchannels, reactive tokens, and contextualized cues, but do not examine receptive factors such as perception and interpretation. In intercultural communication, this is especially important as cues may be misinterpreted based on cultural notions or missed entirely. In addition, in conversations involving NNSs, grammatical errors are often attributed to linguistic proficiency, but such perception errors are often (mistakenly) attributed to the character or personality of the speaker (Ishida, 2006; Gumperz, 1982; Cook, 2001).

There is a large body of research on Japanese-English intercultural communication that explores backchannel behavior in English and Japanese (Maynard, 1986; White, 1989; Clancy et al., 1996; Iwasaki, 1997; Ishida, 2006; etc.). The studies find, in general, that Japanese backchannel use differs from English in terms of location and frequency in conversation. This can cause miscommunication or misperception. Mizutani (1982) observes that Japanese listener backchannels meant to communicate "attentiveness, comprehension, and interest" were instead interpreted

as impatience or demand for quick completion of statement. Maynard (1986) confirms previous findings in a pioneering work on Japanese and American English backchannel behavior which analyzes three minute segments of conversations of 12 dyadic pairs. Based on conversational data, Maynard (1986) classifies five functions of reactive tokens, including: continuer, display of understanding content, support and empathy toward speaker, agreement, and strong emotional response. Although Maynard (1986), like Mizutani (1982), indicates that the functions of backchannels are similar, he concludes that the devices, frequencies, and discourse context differ. Since backchannels serve important and similar functions across languages for listeners to communicate with speakers, such discrepancies in use can lead to misinterpretation issues in intercultural communication.

Subsequent studies involving various other language pairs bolster the findings that differences in backchannel use can provide misleading feedback to the speaker (Berry, 1994; Stubee, 1998; Edstrom, 2005; Li, 2006). Li (2006) video recorded and micro-analyzed conversations of 40 Canadian and 40 Chinese participants who formed 40 dyads in four experimental conditions with roles of patient or physician. The study found negative correlations between backchannel responses and listener recall scores. Therefore, Li (2006) argues that

> [...] back channel responses may have served as misleading feedback, thus preventing the information from being transmitted correctly. In these instances, it could be argued that the listener may have nodded to show '*I am paying attention*' but the speaker could have taken this to mean '*I understand what you are saying*'. (p.11)

To summarize, from the aforementioned studies it is clear that (1) backchannels serve an important and similar function in conversations across cultures for listeners to provide feedback to speakers, (2) backchannel devices, frequency, and context in discourse differ across cultures and (3) differences in use and perception can lead to misinterpretations or miscommunications during intercultural communication.

2.1 Conversational analysis research in specific contexts

Berry (1994) and Edstrom (2005) apply conversational analysis frameworks to the context of group conversations among women. Berry (1994) analyzes the turn-taking styles, with special emphasis on overlapping and backchannels, of American women and Spanish women between the ages of 25 and 35 living in the United States. The author hosted two separate dinner parties, one for four American women in English and one for four Spanish women in Spanish. During the dinner party, the conversations were recorded. Thereafter, the recordings were transcribed and playback interviews were conducted with each participant to investigate the assumptions behind the use of different turn-taking styles. Berry (1994) concludes that the use of backchannels and overlaps differs in English and Spanish causing an increased potential for cross-cultural misunderstanding in these areas.

Edstrom (2005) investigates the conversations of American women learning Spanish and Venezuelan women in Caracas. The participants were 13 Venezuelan and 14 American women aged 32 to 57. Data were collected from recordings of conversations at casual coffee parties, six of which took place at the home of a common acquaintance of attendees. One gathering in Spanish with four Venezuelan women served as the baseline for Spanish, one in English with four American women served as the baseline for English, and the other mixed gatherings were in Spanish. The groups were mixed and during analysis of the conversation data the relationship between participants was taken into consideration because it could influence both

conversation style and topics. After the conversations, participants completed a demographic questionnaire, were interviewed about their views of conversation and conversation style, and then analyzed a playback portion of a conversation in which they participated. Results are discussed taking into consideration Bennett's (1993) model of intercultural sensitivity. According to the model, intercultural development is divided into two categories: ethnocentric and ethnorelative. The ethnocentric category is subdivided into three steps: (a) denial (b) defense and (c) minimization. The ethnorelative category is subdivided into three steps: (a) acceptance (b) adapatation and (c) integration. Edstrom (2005) argues that Bennett's model relates to L2 conversation because both categories are developmental processes which occur on a continuum that is not only one-way. Furthermore, there is no guarantee the end of the continuum will be reached. Edstrom (2005) posits that

> [t]he development of conversational skills can also be conceptualized as a process...characterized at one extreme by denial (or lack of awareness) of conversational realities and at the other by integration of first language (L1) and L2 conversational norms. Between those extremes are stages of defensiveness with regard to one's own conversational preferences and varying degrees of minimalization, acceptance, and adaptation of differences in conversational style. Broadly conceived, participation in L2 conversation is tied to issues of intercultural sensitivity, with an ethnocentric or enthnorelative orientation, and language skills. (pp.25-34)

Taking into consideration Bennett's (1993) model of intercultural sensitivity, Edstrom (2005) finds that the NNSs' participation in L2 conversations is influenced by familiarity with L2 conversation style, ability to accept differences in style, and topic of conversation. In addition, the American women interviewed reported that visiting Americans perceive Venezuelans to be angry when they talk. They referred to features of Venezuelan speech such as gestures, interruption, and simultaneous speech, which for Americans may indicate conflict or hostility and violate norms of 'harmonious interaction'. Edstrom (2005) argues that this misunderstanding arising from conversational style could also lead to a judgment of the character of the speaker. Venezuelan perceptions of American women were not specifically addressed in the study.

3 The present study

3.1 Motivation for the study

Following Berry (1994) and Edstrom (2005), the present study seeks to explore the conversational styles and perceptions of American and Hungarian women ranging from age 24 to 35. The impetus for this research study is the author's personal experience living as an American woman in Budapest for 10 months and learning Hungarian. For the past ten months, I have crossed over between two main social spheres: the first is a progressive, feminist community of Hungarian women and the second is a group of independent, adventurous expatriate women. Each group hosts several social events per month including films, workshops, dinners, board game nights, pub quizzes, etc. There is a core base of women which frequently attend events, but there are many women whose participation is transitory. This creates a mix of friends, acquaintances, and strangers who interact at each event. The Hungarian group is conducted in Hungarian, but some participants also speak English as a second language. In my nine months attending events, I have only encountered one other American woman in the Hungarian group. In the expatriate group, the language of communication is English. There is a core group of American and British NSs, but

many members are NNSs of English. Although the group is mainly expatriates, there are a few Hungarians who have lived abroad or want to be part of an international community. A few American women in the expatriate group learn Hungarian. The expatriate group attracts working women, but, occasionally, students attend as well.

A third, much smaller sphere in which I have participated consists of people from other countries living in Budapest and learning Hungarian. This includes both students and working adults who study Hungarian full time or in their free time. During nine months in this sphere of learners of Hungarian, I have encountered only six other Americans who are conversationally fluent in Hungarian (approximately upper intermediate level or higher). There may be many others, but these are the only ones I have encountered at the two major language schools and the most popular language meetup group in Budapest.

My acquaintances in all spheres know I am learning Hungarian and that I often attend events in Hungarian and English. With many of my close friends and acquaintances we have discussed challenges learning Hungarian and trying to use it in conversations with locals with whom we interact frequently (neighbors, colleagues, classmates, etc.). A common anecdote I hear from Americans, even those with high levels of conversational Hungarian, is how puzzling they find conversations in Hungarian. Few of my American acquaintances have Hungarian friends with whom they converse in Hungarian; and they are often shocked that I do.

As the aforementioned research shows, conversations have been analyzed extensively regarding structure, language use, participant roles, and intercultural communication including L2 English speakers (or ELF speakers); little research, however, exists (in English) on Hungarian-American intercultural communication where all participants speak both languages. Markó, Gósy, and Neuberger (2014) do investigate prosody patterns of feedback in Hungarian, but it was not possible to locate any research related to perception, lexicalized backchannels, or the role of the listener in Hungarian conversation. As Edstrom (2005) argues, such research is essential to design pedagogical materials and teaching methods that assist learners in participating in L2 conversation with native speakers. This can aid both Hungarians learning English and English native speakers learning Hungarian. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate L2 speakers' perceptions of conversational style in English and Hungarian in order to explore whether differences exist which may affect intercultural communication.

3.2 Research questions

The main research questions guiding the present investigation are as follows:

RQ1: How do Hungarian NNSs of English and NSs of American English perceive the dynamics of conversation in English (volume, interruptions, overlaps, backchannels, simultaneous speech, gestures, eye contact, body language, etc.) which influence subtle judgments about speakers and listeners?

RQ2: How do Hungarian NNSs of English and NSs of American English perceive the role of the listener in English conversations?

RQ3: According to participant responses, which taught rules of conversation and/or communication strategies (in Hungarian or in American English) may influence the perception and judgment of speakers and listeners in conversation?

RQ4: According to participant responses, what are the perceived differences between conversations in Hungarian and in English?

4 Methodology

4.1 Participant selection and groups

The data are from conversation recordings and semi-structured interviews conducted in the spring of 2019 in Budapest. Six women living in Budapest participated in the study; three are NSs of Hungarian and three are NSs of American English. Participants ranged in age from 24 to 35. Participants were carefully selected based on age, approximate language proficiency (upper intermediate level or higher in both Hungarian and English), and participation in one of the three spheres previously described (Hungarian women's group, expatriate women's group, or learners of Hungarian). Due to the criterion for inclusion, particularly the difficulty in locating American women who could speak Hungarian at an upper intermediate level or higher, the study could only include a small number of participants.

With the six participants three conversation dyads were created. Two dyads contained NSs of the same language and the third dyad was mixed. For the dyads which shared the same native language, care was taken to select participants who knew each other well enough to have had several conversations together before the data collection. The participants in the mixed dyad both knew the author, but did not meet before the study.

The first dyad contained NSs of Hungarian who knew each other from the Hungarian group. Proficiency in English was determined by personal interactions with the author and professional qualifications. At the time of the study, one participant worked as a researcher, publishing in English, and the other participant was an English teacher and doctoral candidate finishing her dissertation in English.

The second dyad contained NSs of American English who knew each other from the Hungarian learners group. Both participants had lived in Hungary for 2-3 years and studied in a Hungarian literary translation program in Budapest. At the time of the study both women in the NSs of American English dyad were preparing for a C1 Hungarian language exam.

The third dyad included one NS of Hungarian from the Hungarian women's group and one NS of American English from the expatriate women's group. The NS of Hungarian in the mixed dyad studied English at university which required a minimum of B2 level in English and worked as a Hungarian-English translator in a company.

The NS of American English in the mixed dyad worked as a teacher at a Hungarian high school and is a heritage speaker of Hungarian who lived most of her life in the United States. Henceforth, the NSs of Hungarian will be referred to as the NNSs and the NS of American English will be referred to as the NSs because the research was conducted in English. For the purposes of data analysis, all participants were given pseudonyms as seen in Table 1.

Dyad	Participant	Native Language
Hungarian Dyad	Erzsi	Hungarian
	Lili	Hungarian
American Dyad	Jessica	American English
	Samantha	American English
Mixed Dyad	Ági	Hungarian
	Amanda	American English

Table1. Conversational dyads

4.2 Procedures of data collection

Following Berry (1994) and Edstrom (2005), in order to promote as authentic of conversation as possible, each dyad met together in a familiar setting with the researcher present. The NNS Hungarian dyad met in an apartment of one of the participants and the NS American dyad met at a university both participants knew. The mixed dyad met in the apartment of the researcher. Each dyad was invited to participate in a gathering with coffee and conversation, similar to previous settings where participants met with one another or the researcher. The researcher asked permission to record the conversations and informed participants that privacy will be ensured and all data will remain anonymous. The recording was started at the beginning of the gathering.

The researcher participated minimally in the conversation and only contributed when prompted by the participants, such as with a question. The conversation in English served as a stimulus to help participants transition into "English mode" before the semi-structured interviews.

After each conversation, the researcher conducted and recorded a semi-structured interview separately with each participant. The semi-structured interview contained adapted questions from Edstrom (2005) (see Table 2).

Semi-structured Interview Questions
Part 1:
1. Describe a typical conversation with your female friends who are native speakers.
2. Under what conditions might the conversation be more/less animated or louder/softer in volume?
3. What conversational behaviors do you consider rude?
4. When is it acceptable and when is it not acceptable to interrupt another speaker?
5. How do you feel when you are interrupted?
6. When is it acceptable for multiple people to speak at the same time?
7. How do you feel when multiple people speak at the same time?
8. What expressions do people use in English to show that they are listening?
9. How does one know if those expressions are being used sincerely?
Part 2:
10. What have you been taught to do, and not do, in conversation?
11. Why are those practices desirable or undesirable?
12. What are conversational interactions like in your family?
13. Have you ever conversed with a Hungarian/an American?
14. How does that conversation compare to interactions you have with native speakers?
15. How would you feel participating in an L2 conversation with several native speakers of your L2?
16. What factors would make the experience easier and what factors would make the experience harder for you?

Table 2. Semi-structured interview questions (based on Edstrom, 2005)

4.3 Data analysis

Since the recordings of the conversations served as a stimulus to help participants transition into "English mode" before the semi-structured interviews, they will not be analyzed in detail in the current paper. The data from the semi-structured interviews will be summarized and analyzed taking into consideration the previously reviewed literature. To protect the anonymity of participants, entire interviews were not transcribed. There were several portions of interviews which referenced sensitive topics, such as family history, which were not directly related to the research questions. Based on the discretion of the researcher these were omitted from analysis. Question responses were transcribed with the aid of notes taken during the conversations and interviews and the recordings of the interviews. Summary tables for each question were then created. Thereafter, responses were analyzed with reference to the research questions. When responses were vague, the interviews were cross-referenced with recordings and notes from conversations for clarification (of behaviors, elements of conversation, references to body language, etc.). Finally, a simple logical analysis looking for similarities and differences between responses was conducted.

5 Results

In the semi-structured interview (SSI), questions 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 address RQ1, questions 3, 8, and 9 address RQ2, questions 10, 11, and 12 address RQ3, and questions 13, 14, 15, and 16 address RQ4. The findings will be presented below in the order in which the research questions were raised.

5.1 RQ1: Perceptions of the dynamics of conversation

5.1.1 Conversational style: animatedness and volume

NS participants responded that these elements of conversation fluctuate with emotion, interest in topic, trying to catch the attention of listeners, and joking. NNS participants responded that these elements vary based on emotion, whether there is an argument, or interest in shared topic (such as during story telling). Ági stated,

> I don't think I've had enough English conversation to know the difference. Perhaps it's the same as Hungarian. You speak quieter if you are in an environment where you have to be careful that others aren't bothered by you.

5.1.2 Acceptable and unacceptable interruptions

The NS participants responded that it is acceptable to interrupt once the listener has something relevant to what the speaker is saying to contribute to the conversation. Two participants, Jessica and Amanda, noted, however, that this is only acceptable if the speaker has finished what she would like to say or if there is a chance to finish the thought after the interruption. Samantha responded that it is acceptable to interrupt if there is something that requires immediate action or if the topic of conversation is important and the listener interrupts to put the speaker back on the right track or suggest something. On the other hand, one NNS, Ági, stated that interruptions are acceptable only when talking time and number of interruptions is equally distributed among participants in the conversation; otherwise, interruptions are only acceptable to discipline a speaker who is taking up too much space in the conversation. The two other

NNSs, Lili and Erzsi, reported that it is acceptable to interrupt in cases where the listener is so excited about the topic that it is not possible to wait to be part of the conversation or when telling shared stories to which all participants are excited to contribute.

5.1.3 Affective influence of interruptions

Connected to the response of the previous question, NS participants reported being annoyed or upset if the interruption is a "rude" interruption or not based on the topic of the conversation (if the interruption changes the topic). NS participants emphasized that if they were able to finish what they were saying after the interruption, it did not bother them. Among the NNSs, the reaction to interruptions was more negative. Erzsi stated, "I'm very sensitive to that. I feel very bad." Similarly, Lili remarked, "I don't like it, it makes me want to stop and not talk again." On one hand, Ági said that interruptions caused by excitement about the topic don't bother her, and can even be flattering. On the other hand, she explained that interruptions can also feel like the listener does not care and be hurtful.

5.1.4 Acceptable and unacceptable simultaneous speech

Jessica responded that simultaneous speech is always acceptable, whereas Amanda specified that it must be in a conversation without too many critical points or one about giving opinions about something (for example, the color of a clothing item). Samantha could not think of a situation in which it would be acceptable. Samantha expressed that conceptually when multiple people speak at the same time they actually create multiple smaller side conversations separate from the main conversation. Lili and Ági noted that it is acceptable for multiple people to speak at the same time when telling a group story or reacting to the conversation. Erzsi believed it was unavoidable in big group conversations, but added the caveat that it is only acceptable if no one is silenced or excluded. Ági echoed this opinion by stating that outside of reactions, multiple people speaking at the same time is not acceptable if it creates a situation in which everyone cannot speak or be heard.

5.1.5 Affective influence of simultaneous speech

NS participants remarked that their feelings related to multiple people speaking at the same time fluctuate based on contextual factors including setting, people in conversation, etc. Ági declined to respond to this question due to "lack of experience". Erzsi and Lili, both friends in the Hungarian conversation dyad, reported having mixed feelings similar to the NSs. Erzsi stated, "Sometimes I feel lost, because I have these issues with getting myself heard." Thereafter, she clarified that it also depends on the group. In some cases it can be funny or involve intense emotions that can joyful, interesting, or funny to experience as a group. Lili responded to the topic on a linguistic rather than emotional level:

> Generally, I don't like it, because it makes it harder for me to get what they are trying to communicate. They tend to speak faster to 'compete' with each other, which makes it much more difficult for a non-native to follow the thread.

5.2 RQ2: Perception of the role of the listener in English conversation

5.2.1 Rude conversational behaviors

As shown in Table 3, NSs and NNSs consider various behaviors rude. In terms of similarities, four out of the six participants reported interruptions to be rude. Almost all of the behaviors listed are judgments of listeners, not speakers, in conversations. Only 4-5 out of 18 behaviors reported occur when in the role of the speaker during conversation. These speaker behaviors included swearing, lack of eye contact, unequal distribution of speaking time, and only talking about themselves (or lack of interest in others' opinion). The other behaviors judged to be rude are associated with the role of the listener. It is also interesting to note that only the NSs indicated a lack of "active listening", minimal responses, or lack of asking questions to be rude behaviors on the part of the listener.

Semi-structured Interview Question	**3. What conversational behaviors do you consider rude?**
Jessica	• One word responses • When people don't ask questions • When it feels one-sided (unequal distribution of speaking time) • When they only talk about themselves
Samantha	• Not paying attention when someone is talking • Interrupting with an unrelated idea • Interrupting and changing the subject • Cutting someone off with a story to say something completely unrelated
Amanda	• Interrupting • Not actively listening, so someone has to repeat 2-3 times
Erzsi	• Interruptions • Not looking at the person who is talking • Talking over one another • Turning your back and excluding someone from the circle
Lili	• Interruption • Lack of interest in the others' opinion • Lack of eye contact
Ági	• Swearing • Considers same things rude in Hungarian and English

Table 3. Rude conversational behaviors

5.2.2 Listener feedback expressions

SSIQ8 addresses the ways that listeners give feedback to the primary speaker. As indicated in Table 4, although the question asks for "expressions", many participants indicated not only verbal feedback (backchannels or reactive tokens), but also different forms of body language. NS and NNSs highlighted similar backchannel expression and body language used by listeners.

Semi-structured Interview Question	8. What expressions do people use in English to show that they are listening?
Jessica	• "uh huh", "ok", "really", "seriously", "oh my gosh" • asking follow-up questions or clarifying question
Samantha	• "yeah", "I know", or make some noise like "uh, huh"
Amanda	• Being attentive • Looking at person who is speaking • Not multi-tasking or fidgeting • Nod head and say "mhmm", "yes", "I understand", "Right", "Ok"
Erzsi	• Saying "I see", "mmhmm", "sure" • Nodding. • Looking at the person
Lili	• "I understand what you're saying", "I see", "Really?", "OMG", "That is awesome", "Tell me more about it"
Ági	• Saying "yeah", "ok", "I see", etc. to show you are listening • Saying "oh no", "that's cool", "interesting", etc. to show your reaction • "Maybe in English conversation there isn't as much this humming sound. In Hungarian we often say like 'mmm'. "

Table 4. Listener feedback

5.2.3 Sincerity of feedback expressions

There was no major difference in the responses given by NSs and NNSs. Most participants indicated that appropriate body language including eye contact and gestures such as nodding needed to accompany expressions. Body language such as looking around the room, fidgeting, or being on the phone was considered an indicator of insincerity. In addition, the expression type must match what the speaker is discussing, must be used at the right moment in the conversation, and must be said at the appropriate volume (must vary in volume based on context). One NS and one NNS both addressed the difficulty in determining whether the expressions are used sincerely. Samantha stated, "It's hard to know with Americans if they're being sincere or not." Lili also remarked, "You never know with an American."

5.3 RQ3: Taught rules and/or strategies of conversation

RQ3. Which taught rules of conversation (in Hungarian or in American English) may influence the perception and judgment of speakers and listeners in conversation?

SSIQs 10, 11 and 12 attempt to address RQ3 by exploring rules of conversation which participants can consciously remember learning while growing up or from their families. Table 5 below shows the responses to SSIQ10, the first relevant question to address RQ3, which relates to rules that are taught. Based on these responses, there do not seem to be any noticeable patterns among responses that would indicate major differences related to native language or culture. SSIQ11 follows-up by asking why such practices are desirable or undesirable. Several participants from both languages responded that the rules are important in order to show respect to the speaker.

Semi-structured Interview Question	10. What have you been taught to do, and not do, in conversation?
Jessica	• Eye contact • Active listening • Can only interrupt or disagree with peers, can't do it with older people or people of higher rank
Samantha	• Not being on your phone • Listen if they're trying to say something important. Once they finish you don't just respond about something else, but you give feedback with a comment or question about what they said.
Amanda	• Don't look at ground • Be polite • Ask questions in full sentences • Confirm when you're understanding or not • Know how to form question based on who you're speaking to
Erzsi	• Not to interrupt • Don't be disrespectful by using words like "stupid" • Argue with the other person's argument, not critiquing their character.
Lili	• Not to interrupt • To make eye contact • To listen to the other
Ági	• Try to listen, don't interrupt too much • Don't use swear words • Don't be too animated, loud, or use too many gestures, but depends on who you're talking to • Show you are listening with like "mm"

Table 5. Taught rules and/or strategies of conversation

Additionally, the rules are important to be polite, show understanding, and help the conversation continue. Only Ági indicated that not swearing was important in order to be seen as an educated individual and that not speaking too loud was important in order to not bother others. SSIQ12 asked about conversational interaction in the participant's family. In responses, most participants linked previous comments about conversational style, behavior, and rules back to interactions they had as children in their families. Although participants indicated an awareness of how their family interactions influenced their perception of conversations, they also emphasized that as they grew up their role as a participant in the conversation changed (to be allowed to speak more or interrupt, rather than just listen) and so did the rules once they began having conversations with primarily non-family members.

5.4 RQ4: Perceived differences between Hungarian and English Conversation

The semi-structured interview attempted to address RQ4 from several different angles, directly, as in questions 13 and 14 or indirectly, as in questions 15 and 16. SSIQ14 directly asks participants to compare their interactions with NSs and NNSs. As seen in Table 6, responses show that participants had difficulty separating comments

about conversations that happened in English and conversations that happened in Hungarian. Instead, participants responded regarding the behavior of Hungarians and Americans without always specifying if the behavior was specific to the language of communication. Responses alternate between discussing the participant's own behavior in the interaction or the behavior of the other people involved.

Semi-structured Interview Questions	**14. How does that conversation compare to interactions you have with native speakers?**
Jessica	• I police what I say more often with Hungarians (talk slowly, more clearly, more formal). Conversations are more "stilted". • They do a different filler sound "uh huh" or just quietly nod their head. Maybe in general less active than I would judge Americans to be.
Samantha	• It is different because…I'm not exactly sure why. • Native speakers [of English] talk in such a way that they are looking for a certain response • With Hungarians it's much more black and white. For example, 'how are you?' question and ironic statements being taken seriously.
Amanda	• Hungarians use different types of words to say the same thing. They use a wider range of vocabulary (in Hungarian).
Erzsi	• It's just inherently difficult to talk in English, so I always feel relieved to talk in Hungarian. • Groups of friends who talk in Hungarian and in English do not have big differences. • In general or in more formal situations, I've always had the sense that if it's in English it has to be more polite. People would say a lot of expressions out of courtesy.
Lili	No response.
Ági	No response.

Table 6. Differences in interactions with NS and NNSs

SSQI15 asked how participants would feel participating in an L2 conversation with several native speakers. Jessica and Samantha highlighted that they more frequently have conversations in Hungarian with other foreigners than with locals. Jessica clarified that when she speaks Hungarian with native speakers it is usually in service encounters; but speaks in English with most of her Hungarian friends. NSs also indicate they have trouble taking turns in the conversation, making jokes, or talking about higher level topics in Hungarian. Regarding her feelings about conversing in the L2 (Hungarian) with native speakers, Amanda states simply, "I feel like I'm a 5 year old who never learned to speak adult language." Rather than causing anxiety or worry for learners, in each interaction with Hungarians American participants simply switch to English as the language of communication when problems arise.

Semi-structured Interview Questions	16. What factors would make the experience easier or harder for you?
Jessica	• If they stop and directly ask me questions that would be easier.
Samantha	• If my grammar was better • Sometimes it's hard...I usually don't want people to take me literally when I talk. Sometimes in Hungarian I think things get taken literally that I didn't intend to get taken literally. • I think Americans complain a lot to make the other person feel comfortable (about the weather, or school). I think in Hungarian that's different.
Amanda	• Understanding a lot of Hungarian adult slang or knowing more description words • Someone telling me the topic and then words associated with the topic

Table 7. Factors influencing conversation with Hungarian native speakers

The NNSs, when discussing conversation in English, mainly mention personal factors that inhibit them from participating such as anxiety about speaking in English and lack of confidence in their ability to understand or speak quickly enough while conversing with NSs. As a follow-up, SSIQ16 asked participants which factors would make the experience of participating in L2 conversations with native speakers easier or harder. Responses vary by individual (see Table 7 and 8), but several factors mentioned were linguistic proficiency, conversational style, personality, and topic of conversation.

Semi-structured Interview Questions	16. What factors would make the experience easier or harder for you?
Erzsi	• English will always be harder, because I'd never reach the same proficiency in English as I have in Hungarian. • I wish native speakers would be more attentive with non-natives to see if I understand. Native speakers don't have awareness of the non-native listener who may be struggling. • Learning about professional topics that in themselves require skills or knowledge that I may not have had.
Lili	• Easier if other people in group are similar in personality • Easier to talk to introverts because they don't dominate the conversation as much
Ági	• Easier if there were less native speakers • Easier if everyone made some language mistakes

Table 8. Factors influencing conversation with English native speakers

6 Discussion

The results of the study show many similarities in the perception of conversational style and the role of the listener in Hungarian and in English conversation. Interviews

demonstrate that most participants have similar perceptions about conversational style in English regarding volume, simultaneous speech, and backchannels. The backchannels and listener feedback reported in the current study support previous findings related to listener feedback in terms of backchannel expressions and body language. Regardless of native language, participants also had similar perceptions of what a good listener in a conversation should do. The answers to questions regarding taught rules of conversation and family interactions helped to better understand what shapes the perception of conversation, but were not remarkably different across cultures.

The findings suggest that participants perceive interruptions differently based on native language and culture. The NNSs described negative feelings associated with interruptions. NSs, however, provided a deeper description of when interruptions are acceptable and unacceptable. NSs verbalized several factors which influence whether they perceive interruptions to be negative. The first set of factors is related to the content of the interruption. If the interruption is extremely relevant to the current topic, immediate in nature, or encourages the primary speaker to continue in some way (by a question or suggestion to guide conversation), then it is acceptable. The second set of factors relates to the purpose or 'outcome' of the interruption. If the interruption is irrelevant in such a way that it changes the topic of the conversation or inhibits the primary speaker from finishing the thought, then it is an unacceptable interruption. Outside of these specific contexts, NSs appear to have a higher tolerance of interruptions than NNSs. It is not clear whether NNSs simply did not provide as much detail in their answers or if they are unaware of these pragmatic rules which influence the NSs perception of interruptions. Perception of interruptions in both English and Hungarian could be an area for future research.

Data from the semi-structured interviews also suggest that the role of the listener is perceived slightly different in English and in Hungarian. American NSs referred several times to 'active listening' or the necessity to explicitly comment or ask follow-up questions in order to be a good listener. NNSs seemed to be aware of this type of listening as well based on their ability to list several backchannel expressions used to give feedback. In comparing the languages, Jessica stated: "They [Hungarians] do a different filler sound 'uh huh' or just quietly nod their head. Maybe in general less active than I would judge Americans to be."

Ági seemed to make the same observation when she stated, "Maybe in English conversation there isn't as much this humming sound. In Hungarian we often say like 'mmm'." These comments suggest that the role of the listener is to be more active in English using not only non-lexical backchannels, but also phrasal and substantive backchannels. Future research could explore the type, frequency, and locations of backchannel use in Hungarian in order to provide a more detailed comparison with English that may affect perception and intercultural communication.

The data collected through participant observation, recorded conversations, and semi-structured interviews did not directly uncover many differences in conversational style, but it may have revealed a possible effect of cultural differences or lack of linguistic proficiency: avoidance. The NSs of American English clearly expressed that they speak in Hungarian more often with foreigners than with native speakers of Hungarian. In some cases, this was out of consideration for other members of the friend group who did not speak Hungarian. In other cases, it was a direct result of a lack of linguistic proficiency. When speakers of American English encounter mixed linguistic groups or gaps in their knowledge, the solution reported by participants was to switch to English. Although in this way they may avoid the linguistic and pragmatic differences related to their own knowledge of Hungarian, they do encounter some difficulties which could influence intercultural communication. Jessica described these conversations as 'stilted' because she polices what she says by taking care to

talk slow, speak clearly, or be formal. Samantha noted difficulties speaking with native and non-native speakers. With native speakers, she says they search for a 'certain response' and with non-native speakers she notes that what she says is sometimes taken too literally. In sum, in response to linguistic proficiency (of the participant herself or other in the conversation) the Americans interviewed speak Hungarian with non-Hungarians and English with Hungarians.

The Hungarians interviewed also indicated a certain level of avoidance regarding conversations in the L2 with native speakers. Ági captures this beautifully as she responded, with hesitation, to the question concerning what would make L2 conversation with native speakers easier:

> This is going to sound bad... maybe if they were not native English speakers it would be easier to talk to them. Like if everyone was making mistakes, I would feel more comfortable with my pronunciation.

Similarly, Erzsi expressed that she wished native speakers would be more attentive with non-native speakers to see whether or not the non-native speakers understood. Furthermore, she observed that native speakers don't have awareness of the non-native listener who may be struggling. In the case of native speakers of Hungarian, it is not always an option to switch to their native language in order to clarify when such difficulties in understanding language or culture arise. Perhaps this explains why it may be easier to communicate in English with non-native speakers who struggle with the same issues and have a higher level of awareness.

7 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it may be argued that perceptions of NNs and NNSs of American English and Hungarian may differ slightly concerning the conversational style and the role of the listener in Hungarian and English. The study suggests that perceived differences do affect behavior in conversations, but another important factor is linguistic proficiency. Even if participants are aware of differences, it is not always certain that they can enact their pragmatic knowledge linguistically. In cross cultural and intercultural communication it is not only pragmatic awareness that is necessary, but also awareness of the language proficiency of the other members in the conversation. Future studies can explore this area by conducting research in Hungarian about the Hungarian language with Hungarian and American speakers of English.

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Author data: Amy Soto is a lecturer at Eötvös Loránd University teaching English language and American culture. Her main areas of research are second language acquisition and use, language teaching, language assessment, and applied linguistics.